REPORT ON SITE VISIT
BLACKSTONE RIVER VALLEY SPECIAL RESOURCE STUDY
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The Blackstone River Valley's national significance rests with its role in the industrialization of America. Samuel Slater's strategy of employing families in his textile mills set an important pattern for other mills in this valley and neighboring ones, but as the use of families diminished, the mills continued to flourish, so the significance does not end there. Rather, the construction of small mills and adjacent villages represents an important aspect of industrial development, contrasted to the large corporate investment of a place like Lowell. Far more typical was the kind of industrial development that occurred in the Blackstone Valley. While this might have been occurring elsewhere, no other place has such a concentration of surviving mills and villages that can so eloquently illustrate this chapter of American history.

During our visit we discussed many aspects of industrialization. I defer to Walter Licht and his analysis of four paths toward industrialization, of which the type represented in the Blackstone—that of small- to medium-sized companies owned by resident industrialists who built communities in rural areas—was an important course. I also defer to him on the term "industrialization"; "industrial revolution" is viewed as less descriptive because it implies an event, whereas industrialization today is seen as a long-term process. Another trend in the study of industrialization that is particularly pertinent here is that of viewing this place as part of a regional network. These mill villages were connected by transportation corridors (river, canal, railroad, roads) but also by the flow of people, capital, and ideas. Natural resources, capital, labor, agriculture and many other forces converged in the valley, but also operated outwards again, as products, people, and expertise found its way into the hinterlands.

Placing the Blackstone in the national and even global story is another worthwhile strategy. Again, I defer to my colleagues, who identified the Blackstone's primary story as cotton, linking the valley to the American South through its raw material as well as its primary product ("negro cloth"). Slavery connects the valley to global trade and economic forces. The textile mills also fostered the development of machine shops, which through their products and skilled workers linked to places far beyond the valley.

Although discussing the various facets of the Blackstone individually runs the danger of isolating them from their network contexts, it is nonetheless important to relate this discussion to the place and to the resources. Place-based themes, justifiable in light of the industry's extraordinary impact on the landscape and the high degree of preservation, are easily related to these resources.

River and tributaries. (Theme: natural setting)
The river is obviously the heart of the valley and also forms a convenient "spine" to tie the places together. While the environmental determinism of rivers with falls making inevitable the water-powered industrial development of New England is no longer a valid concept, the natural advantages of the topography should be recognized.

Dams, reservoirs, power canal. (Theme: engineering)
Water power is central to the Blackstone story. It is important to view the valley as an engineered landscape, entailing not only the canal but also its attendant features such as dams, reservoirs, power canals, tail races, etc. This engineering affected not only the mills, but also had secondary effects on farmers and other neighbors, contributing to the necessity of considering the interconnectedness of the valley.

Canal, railroad, roads, bike path. (Theme: transportation)
The canal as a transportation corridor also works as a spine. Land-based forms of transportation, while more mundane, are also important conceptually and were even more important economically.

Mills. (Theme: industrialization)
These buildings, the heart of the industrialized landscape, represent both the company and the technology. The mill is an easily comprehended part of the landscape—it looks like a mill building. Its architecture reflects its function: the size of the building depended on the capacity of the water-power system; the shape of the building, its large windows, and roof design reflected the need for natural light; the masonry construction and exterior stair tower demonstrated the concern about fire; and the bell tower represented a new kind of discipline governing work.[1]

Mill housing. (Themes: labor, ethnicity, paternalism)
These collections of company-built and –owned houses, visible expressions of workers and workers' lives, are also hallmarks of the kind of industrial development experienced by the Blackstone. The valley's industrialists' preference for family workers resulted in construction of single- and multiple-family housing, in stark contrast to the boardinghouses of Lowell. I will address mill housing in more detail below. Another industrial housing form that should not be overlooked is the three-deckers, such as those found in Woonsocket. While innately an urban, as opposed to village, form, as speculatively built and rental housing they are also important for constituting an alternative to company-built housing.[2]

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[1] This analysis borrowed in part from Richard E. Greenwood, "Industrial Architecture of the Blackstone River Valley," *The Early Architecture and Landscapes of the Narragansett Basin, Volume II: The Blackstone River Valley and Providence*, Claire W. Dempsey, Richard E. Greenwood, and Wm. McKenzie Woodward, eds. (Vernacular Architecture Forum, 2001), 21-25.

[2] Kingston Wm. Heath, *The Patina of Place: The Cultural Weathering of a New England Industrial Landscape* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee Press, 2001), discussed three-deckers in New Bedford, contrasting them to company housing.

Farms. (Theme: agriculture)
The farms of the valley not only provided a labor force, foodstuffs, and technological expertise to the mill villages, they also received an outward flow of people, products, and expertise. The hilltop farms express this connection well. The Whitinsville farm, developed by the industrialists, was unusual and further connects agriculture to industry.

Cities. (Theme: urbanization)
The valley is not all farms and villages; the cities within it should be seen as part of the fabric. Providence provided capital for industrial development as well as a port for shipment of raw materials and products. Worcester, which owed its development in part to the Blackstone, provided access to the hinterlands. Pawtucket and Woonsocket were mill villages that grew into cities. All of these should be seen as part of the network that makes up the Blackstone River Valley.

I would like to develop one of these themes further, and that is the one concerning mill housing. First, a word on terminology. While "company town" as a term was rejected by some of my colleagues as inappropriate here due to the lack of a political identification for these villages, I think the Blackstone's communities fit into most definitions of company towns. John Garner, for instance, defined a company town as one constructed, supervised, and owned by a single business enterprise.[3] But "mill village" is the term preferred locally and it also characterizes these communities adequately. The inclusiveness of "village" as opposed to just housing is also intentional, as the housing's relationship to the mill, water-power system, canal, and river is also important. The appearance in the late 19th and early 20th centuries of curvilinear road systems and landscaped parks should also be considered within this theme.

The mill villages are an engineered landscape, just as the mills and their power systems are. These villages did not spring up organically. They are manifestations of the companies, particularly in their intentions and attitudes toward their workers. In the housing, the hierarchy of a village is often apparent, both in the size of the dwellings (management receiving larger houses) and in their location (management housing located on high ground, farther from the mill). These corporate communities often demonstrated a paternalistic interest in the morality of their employees, complemented by a rigid sense of social hierarchy. This early 19th-century attitude continued in some of these villages long after other industrialists took a more businesslike and detached attitude toward their employees.[4]

Recent scholarship looks at company towns not only as a place of top-down, management-driven authority but also as a place of workers' agency, where workers were

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[3] John S. Garner, *The Model Company Town: Urban Design through Private Enterprise in Nineteenth-Century New England* (Amherst: University of Massachusetts, 1984), 5.

[4] Margaret Crawford, *Building the Workingman's Paradise: The Design of American Company Towns* (London: Verso, 1995), 33, mentions Whitinsville and Hopedale in this regard. Hopedale is the focus of Garner, mentioned above.

active participants in creating the environment they wanted to inhabit.[5] I prefer to see it as a kind of negotiation, reflecting the constraints on each player. Evidence of the worker's role in manipulating his/her environment is found in *how* tenants lived in these houses. Mill housing accommodated a variety of people, family and otherwise, using different strategies for survival and upward mobility, depending on their life stage and other factors. The standard living units misleadingly imply a uniform experience, but tenants used company houses for different purposes at different times. Retention of tenants should also be examined; it is likely the tenants moved in and out at a greater rate than one might think. In addition, these houses should also be viewed as places of work, for women, especially.

There are several dangers in reading the built environment, so some caution is in order. Although appearing today as peaceful, bucolic villages, these communities were busy, industrial, hard places. The survival of the brick houses implies a permanence that may not have been there, both in the tenants and also in the architecture; the frame houses tend to disappear. Also, dwellings intended for families are easily re-used, whereas boarding houses rarely survive. The quaint mill villages that appear today need to be set in a context of all the living arrangements that were necessary and available.

While the villages today seem fairly static, we must also address the issue of change over time. These mill villages were built between the early 19th century and the 1940s. While some house types seemed fairly consistent over time—early 19th-century houses strikingly similar to those built in the 1860s—others did evolve. The double houses of Whitinsville seem to have been supplemented by row houses later in the century, while the four-unit houses of Slatersville were converted to single-family houses, albeit for higher-ranking tenants.

The architectural evolutions also reflect different understandings of the villages. The remaking of Slatersville as a Colonial Revival village in the 1920s, complete with church on village green, and the development of model company housing in Hopedale in the 1890s also point to continued interest in the moral welfare of employees, or at least the appearance thereof, by subsequent company owners, sometimes in the same family. The references to some of these villages in the Progressive Era literature on company towns and corporate paternalism indicate the effectiveness of these campaigns.[6] "Model

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[5] Crandall A. Shifflett, *Coal Towns: Life, Work, and Culture in Company Towns of Southern Appalachia, 1880-1960* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 1991). Karen Bescherer Metheny, *From the Miners' Doublehouse: Archaeology and Landscape in a Pennsylvania Coal Company Town* (Knoxville: University of Tennessee, 2007).

[6] My files turned up the following references. Hopedale cited as an example in: Edwin L. Shuey, *Factory People and their Employers: How Their Relations are made Pleasant and Profitable* (NY: Lentilhon, 1900), 128; James H. Patterson, "Altruism and Sympathy as Factors in Works Administration," *The Engineering Magazine* 20 (1901): 577-602; Charles Buxton Going, "Village Communities of the Factory, Machine Works, and Mine," *The Engineering Magazine* 21 (1901): 59-74; Robert A .Woods, "The Human Touch in Industry," *Munsey's Magazine* 29, No. 3 (June 1903): 321-328; G. W. W. Hanger, "Housing of the Working People in the United States by Employers," *Bulletin of the Bureau of Labor*, No. 54 (Washington: GPO, 1904), 1191-1243; Budget Meakin, *Model Factories and Villages: Ideal Conditions of Labour and Housing* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1905), 406; and Grosvenor Atterbury, "Model Towns in

town" is an awkward term, usually without a definition, but it seems to have been equated with the employment of an architect (and perhaps his own publicity). Hopedale was often cited as a model town.[7] The employment of nationally known landscape architects such as William Manning, Arthur Shurtleff, and the Olmsted Brothers is important, but even more significant is the continued interest of later generations of corporate owners in redeveloping their company towns. Whether the owners' intentions were superficial or sincere merits further investigation.

While the model towns and use of famous designers might attract the attention of some historians, equally important are the less publicized villages that are far more typical. A village such as Lonsdale or Ashton, with its rows of identical brick gable-roofed dwellings with rhythmic fenestration and repetitive configurations, aligned with the river, facing the mill, is a significant expression of 19th-century industrialization. The abundant literature on the exceptional mill villages should be balanced against the numerical dominance of "ordinary" mill villages.

The reinvestment in these mill villages, so evident in the architecture, argues for an extended period of significance. The new housing and parks in Hopedale in the 1890s and the remaking of Slatersville in the 1920s show an ongoing interest in the mill village as a paternalistic arrangement. Some of the villages remained in company ownership into the 1950s, so the period of significance should extend to include that. Furthermore, the textile and machine industries continued past World War II. Cotton production in New England continued to increase until 1920 so, while it is undeniable that the cotton industry began moving south in the late 19th century, the industry in the Blackstone Valley continued well into the 20th.

Another aspect of industrialization is its demise, which is an important story in the Blackstone. Deindustrialization, its causes and effects, should be addressed and can be encompassed in the period of significance extending to the 1950s, even though the process continues. If the period of significance were extended to the present, subsequent uses of the Blackstone such as conversions of mills to housing, heritage tourism represented by the Heritage Corridor, and subdivision of farms for suburban-style housing would be included. But these are aspects of deindustrialization that are found elsewhere. Reinvestment and different ways of thinking about the past are interesting developments that merit exploration and interpretation, but they are not essential to the Blackstone's industrialization story.

The significance of the Blackstone Valley lies in its role as a regional network in which technological expertise, labor, and capital interacted. This complex movement of people is also deeply rooted in place: the river, canal, mills, villages, farms, and cities.

America," *Scribner's Magazine* 52, No. 1 (July 1912): 20-35. Atterbury also cited Whitinsville. Whitin Shops mentioned in Henry Roland, "Six Examples of Successful Shop Management," *The Engineering Magazine* 12 (October 1896): 69-85.

[7] For example, in Woods, Meakin, and Atterbury cited in note 6, as well as Crawford and Garner cited in notes 3 and 4.

Isolating specific sites for designation inevitably underplays these important interactions. Instead, viewing the Blackstone Valley as a cultural landscape credits the interconnectedness, the "wholeness" as one NPS document called it.[8] Cultural landscape, an academic concept recognized by the National Park Service, refers to the human interaction with nature, or "the interaction of people and place," distinct from and broader than the consciously designed landscape. [9] The cultural landscape of the Blackstone River Valley includes canals, dams, farms, mill villages, and cities—the sum of the human imprint on the land.

We have been encouraged to make specific recommendations for NPS designation. We were shown only a few sites during our visit, so naturally any recommendations we make will be skewed toward those sites. If specific sites must be selected, the typical should be included along with the extraordinary: Hopedale Mill along with Slater's Mill, Lonsdale as well as Hopedale, Ashton as well as Whitinsville. The sheer volume of the industry, evidenced by the number of mill villages, should be captured as well.

Far preferable to site-specific identification would be an inclusive designation of the Blackstone River Valley as a National Park, conceiving of the Valley as a unified cultural landscape. Boundaries might comprise the entire watershed. The NPS would not of course own this property, but its administration of it would be aided by a comprehensive mandate: the NPS should consider the entire valley as a unified whole, much as the current Heritage Corridor does. The NPS should resist the impulse to focus its attention on selected sites into which it puts all its resources, for by so doing it would misinterpret the core of the valley's significance, which is a regional network of technological expertise, capital and labor that fostered a type of industrial development essential to our nation's growth.

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[8] *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor* (1989, 2001), 15.

[9] Paul Groth, "Frameworks for Cultural Landscape Study," *Understanding Ordinary Landscapes*, Paul Groth and Todd W. Bressi, eds. (New Haven: Yale University, 1997), 1. J. B. Jackson, a landscape architect, is recognized as the father of cultural landscape studies, which are also called ordinary or vernacular landscapes. John Brinckerhoff Jackson, *Discovering the Vernacular Landscape* (New Haven: Yale University, 1984). D. W. Meinig, *The Interpretation of Ordinary Landscapes* (New York: Oxford, 1979). Arnold R. Alanen and Robert Z. Melnick, eds., *Preserving Cultural Landscapes in America* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins, 2000).